

Domestic Violence



What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence can take many different forms but most often involves a current or ex-partner in a relationship harming the other partner. This harm may be:

1. Physically (physically hurting you)
2. Emotionally (threatening and purposely insulting you, or keeping you away from others)
3. Financially (preventing you from access to any finances)
4. Doing anything to make you feel unsafe, threatened or controlled.

These abusive behaviours are likely to persist in the relationship over time and once it has ended.

The impact of domestic violence

It is well known now that domestic violence has a significant and sometimes devastating impact on those who experience it. Experiencing domestic violence can make you feel helpless and out of control. It has a negative impact on self esteem and feelings of self worth and can lead to the development of mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety.

Unfortunately, in many circumstances where domestic violence occurs, children also face significant impacts. We know that children don't necessarily need to witness the domestic violence occurring to be impacted by it as well.

Children can be impacted by:

- witnessing domestic violence
- hearing arguments and hearing others being abused
- seeing the physical injuries of their loved one
- seeing the distress of their loved one
- living in an environment where fear and stress are pervasive
- their primary carer being traumatised or having mental health difficulties as a result of domestic violence.

The impact on children

Children can be so impacted by domestic violence that this impact becomes traumatic for them. This can lead to children experiencing a number of difficulties in many different areas of their lives.

Children who live in families where there is domestic violence can have difficulties with their emotions; their behaviours; their relationships with others; and their learning. These difficulties can go on for some time and can get worse over time, especially if there is not an available adult who recognises the impact and takes steps to help the child.

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Some of the ways these difficulties may be expressed for children experiencing domestic violence includes:

- Their emotions may go up and down more than is normal for their age and stage of development. They may lose their temper easily or become distressed easily. When this happens they may find it hard to calm themselves down.
- They may withdraw from their friends and / or family and be very quiet. They may not seem to do the things they previously enjoyed.
- The difficult emotions they experience may be expressed through their behaviours. This may mean that they seem to be misbehaving more often, when really it is that they are feeling stressed and upset and have less control over their behaviours.
- They may be startled or frightened more easily, especially to loud noises or accidental bumps from others.
- They may have extra difficulty getting along with their friends or peer group, especially if they are having difficulty getting in control of their emotions.
- It may be difficult for them to trust other adults and feel safe with them.
- They may have extra difficulties in the classroom due to loud noises, lots of people and the stress they feel. This may mean that they find it more difficult to sit still and listen; to follow instructions; to remember what they are supposed to be doing; and to focus. They may miss out on large amounts of learning, leading to learning difficulties.

Supporting children

There are many ways that the impact of domestic violence can be lessened for children. Of course, the most important factor is that children are in an environment where they, and their loved ones, are safe and free from danger.

Children who have experienced by domestic violence can be supported by:

- Recognising their experience and the impact it has had on them in terms of their emotional and physical health, their social wellbeing and their learning.
- Ensuring that there is a safe, trusted adult that they can talk to and that can support them.
- Being connected to schools and community groups that can provide safe, supportive environments for children.
- Focusing on their strengths and promoting the successes they have.

Talking to your child's school about what is happening at home can also be very helpful. Teachers can then provide extra support to your child, which may be through checking in with them more regularly, helping them with their learning or getting them involved in more school activities.

Getting help

Seeking help for domestic violence can be very difficult but early support for children can make a big difference for them. Remember, everyone has a right to feel safe and free from danger.